



RISEN MOTHERHOOD

Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments

**EMILY JENSEN &
LAURA WIFLER**



THIS BOOK BELONGS TO



“Parenting is often the crucible in which we learn what we can and cannot control. Laura and Emily remind us that while we cannot control people or circumstances, we can control our perspective. They offer us a framework for motherhood that transcends time and culture but that also faithfully addresses us in the here and now. I’m thankful for this hope-filled book.”

—**Jen Wilkin, director of classes and curriculum, The Village Church, and author of *Women of the Word, None like Him, and In His Image***

“Emily and Laura are the best friends I wish I’d had during the difficult days of early motherhood, when my patience wore thin, my boredom loomed large, and my sense of worth and purpose became muddled. The wisdom they have to offer in the pages of this book is seasoned and scriptural.”

—**Nancy Guthrie, author, Bible teacher, and ongoing pursuer of risen motherhood**

“*Risen Motherhood* delivers practical and present wisdom, anchored to timeless biblical truth. In *Risen Motherhood*, moms find empathy, encouragement, and the reminder that true hope for moms is through the transforming work of the gospel, alone.”

—**Ruth Chou Simons, bestselling author of *GraceLaced* and *Beholding and Becoming: The Art of Everyday Worship***

“This wonderful book offers deep sympathy and understanding to those who face the stress and challenges of motherhood. It also provides moms with a clear vision of their profound purpose and the hope they need to live vibrantly and meaningfully within this divine role. I highly recommend this book.”

—**Sally Clarkson, bestselling author and host of the *At Home with Sally* podcast**

“If you are looking for practical tips on mothering and how-tos, this is not the book for you. But if you need to be refreshed and reminded that what Jesus accomplished on the cross and the grace available to us is sufficient for our daily mothering needs, you’ve come to the right place. *Risen Motherhood* will inspire you toward Bible reading, rest in the Savior, and joy—shored up by gospel truth—for the little years.”

—**Trillia Newbell, author of *Sacred Endurance, If God Is For Us, and God’s Very Good Idea***

“Reading *Risen Motherhood* is like enjoying a long conversation with two girlfriends who will make you laugh out loud, comfort your tears, and faithfully speak life-giving words of truth to your soul. With wisdom and insight, Emily Jensen and Laura Wifler

help moms connect the story line of Scripture to the daily realities of motherhood. This book is one every mom should read—I can't wait to share it with others!"

—Melissa Kruger, director of women's content for The Gospel Coalition and the author of *Walking with God in the Season of Motherhood*

"With *Risen Motherhood*, Emily and Laura offer us practical and theological insights on the nature of a mother's work and soul. This gem of a book explores how God is using sippy cups and play dates for His greater purposes. So come, read, and learn—not just how to rock the cradle but how to trust the One who rules the world."

—Hannah Anderson, author of *Humble Roots: How Humility Grounds and Nourishes Your Soul*

"Admittedly, I am not exactly the core audience for *Risen Motherhood*—the ministry or the book. That said, I always keep my ear to the ground for ministries I can grow to trust and then recommend to others. I'm delighted to say that for as long as I've followed Emily's and Laura's work I have benefitted from it. Even better, I have seen many Christian moms I know and love read their website, listen to their podcast, and grow through it. I'm thankful they've now added this book to the many channels through which they serve God by serving his people."

—Tim Challies, bestselling author and popular blogger and book reviewer

"It's easy to find friends who are quick to offer their opinion and advice. But it's rare to have friends who will point you back to the truth of the gospel of Jesus. Reading *Risen Motherhood* is like sitting down with those rare friends who offer truth—with grace and love—as you navigate the exhausting journey of parenting in this opinion-ridden culture."

—Jerrad Lopes, founder of DadTired.com and author of *Dad Tired...and Loving It*

"How does a Christian mom carry out her labors in raising children? By grace through faith in her crucified and risen Savior. The goal of *Risen Motherhood* ministry is to boldly announce and clearly explain the gospel of Jesus Christ—there's no better news for moms than this. I'm praying this book will strengthen weary hearts and fuel joyful worship of our risen Lord as moms flip through its pages."

—Gloria Furman, author of *Missional Motherhood and Treasuring Christ When Your Hands Are Full*

"This book is a breath of eternally fresh air. It's not another how-to-mother manual, but a beautiful explanation of very, very good news for every mom."

—Quina Aragon, spoken word artist and author of *Love Made: A Story of God's Overflowing, Creative Heart*

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LAURA WIFLER



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*For the Risen Motherhood community.
We're grateful to grow in the gospel alongside you.*





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While our names are on the front of this book, the full weight of authorship is a heavy load we couldn't have carried without a small army of support.

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Finally, the Lord. He planted the love of the gospel in our hearts long ago. He provided all the resources, space, mental energy, and more to do this, even when we felt completely depleted and insufficient for the task at hand.

We adore you, God. We hope this serves you.



Motherhood is hard.

*One second, we think we're doing a good enough job;
the next, we feel like the worst mom on the planet.
Which is why we need the refreshing truth of the gospel
to be repeated over and over again,
giving us hope in the everyday moments.*

We'd love to hear what you're learning as you read.

*Share your thoughts with the hashtag
#risenmotherhoodbook.*





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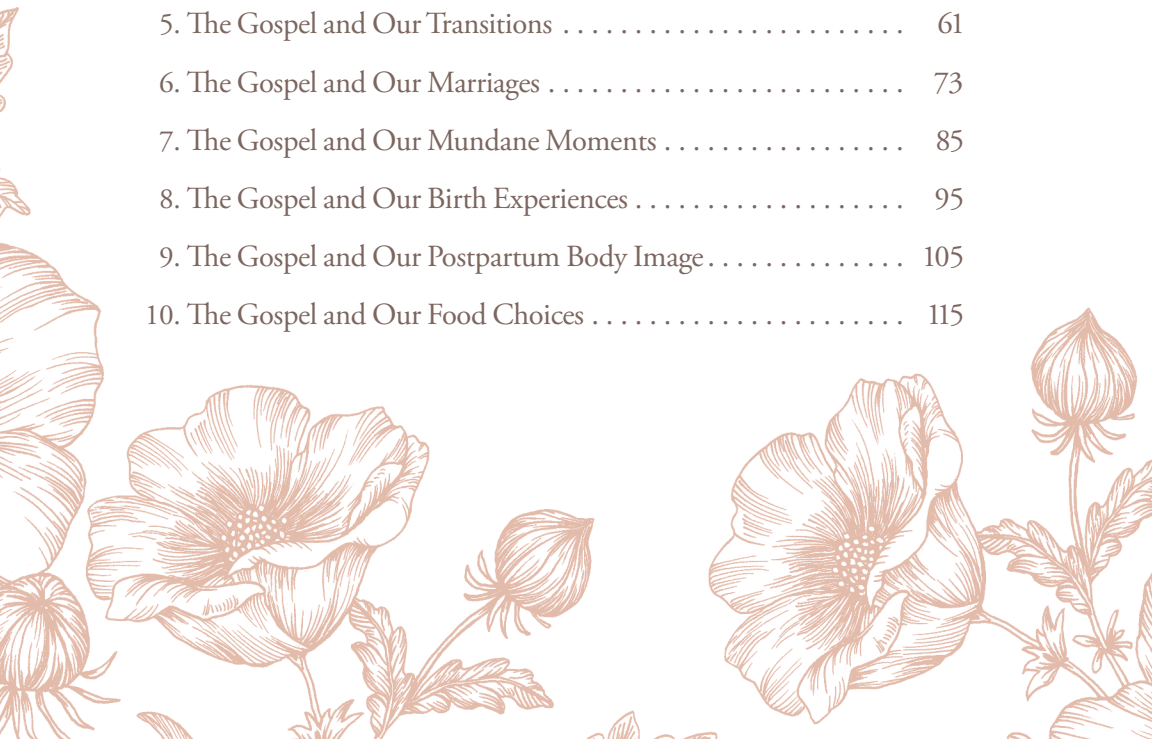
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INTRODUCTION

Emily and Laura

We're often asked what the name *Risen Motherhood* means. It's simple. It's living out motherhood in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet at the same time, it's complex. It's one thing to understand logically that Jesus died on the cross and rose again for you; it's another to understand it in a way that transforms your every day. In 2016, as two sisters-in-law in the throes of young motherhood, that's exactly what we were trying to figure out. We knew what Christ had done, but we couldn't articulate why it mattered much beyond our eternal status. We understood that Scripture applied to our lives, but we weren't really sure what that might look like in our day to day.

So we started to talk about it. As we asked questions and attempted to tether our answers to biblical principles, we realized that other moms probably wondered the same things. Could we all learn together? With that thought came the idea to start a podcast that linked the ancient truths of Christian faith to modern motherhood.

We quietly launched the first episode of the *Risen Motherhood* podcast in January of 2016. We determined to release five episodes and then fade off into the Internet distance, but God had other plans. Quickly, we realized the podcast topics struck a chord deep in moms' hearts. Listeners from all over started submitting their questions, so we tried to tackle them one by one. Motherhood

is complex and messy, and we knew we couldn't speak for all moms, so we just shared what we were learning. We asked questions and bounced ideas off each other, trying to grasp what faithful motherhood looked like in the lives God had given us. Each episode was simply meant to be a conversation that served as a springboard for further discussions among mom-friends in real life.


Over time, the podcast grew and eventually became a nonprofit ministry. We also had the opportunity to write this book. In all our content on social media, on our website, and in this book, our hope is the same: to come alongside other moms as friends in the trenches. No parenting advice. No guilt trips. No five-step lists to success. Just two regular moms working out their salvation day by day, trying to live a risen motherhood, and praying it's helpful for others.

In the years since writing the *Risen Motherhood* book, we've packed up the baby and toddler clothes, given away our strollers and cribs, and tossed out the pacifiers and burp cloths. Our children have grown, and so have we. But what strikes us is that the principles we wrote in this book still ring true.

Every stage of motherhood seems to be filled with triumphs and failures, joys and griefs, happiness and sorrows. It's the tension we learn to hold as mothers. Yet through it all, the hope of the gospel meets us and shapes us. Whether you are married or single, working outside the home or staying at home, raising eight biological children, going through a season of infertility, or considering adoption, God's Word matters. Risen motherhood is available for you too.

Our deepest hope for this book is that you wouldn't get caught up in the way we did things, what examples we used, or the details of our lives, but that you would be able to see the overarching beauty of the gospel shining bright on these pages. We don't want you to be exactly like us. We want you to be like Christ. So take what's helpful and get rid of the rest. Our prayer is that every mother who picks up this book would come to know the saving and transforming work of Christ in every facet of motherhood.

You're going to hear us say it a lot: "The gospel changes everything." But we don't just say it. It is utterly, gloriously, transcendentally true. Here's to a risen motherhood for all of us.

The background is a solid light brown color. It is decorated with several line art illustrations of peonies and their leaves. In the top left, there is a branch with several pointed leaves. In the top right, a large, fully bloomed peony flower is shown. In the bottom left, another large peony flower is depicted. In the bottom center, there is a smaller, partially bloomed flower. In the bottom right, a large peony flower is shown, similar to the one in the top right. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

HERE'S TO
A RISEN
MOTHERHOOD
FOR ALL OF US





I

WHY DOES THE GOSPEL MATTER IN MOTHERHOOD?





RISEN MOTHERHOOD

Emily and Laura

Risen Motherhood started with potty training. It sounds silly, but as we both taught our oldest sons to use the potty, feeling weary of frequent clothing changes and the slow climb to success, we needed some tangible hope.

Since we lived five hours apart at the time, we discussed our experiences over a walkie-talkie app on our phones, leaving each other voice messages to respond to. We lamented the soiled laundry, celebrated the tiny victories, and shared our deeper struggles.

“It’s just not clicking. I feel angry—is that normal?” one of us asked.

“Do you feel impatient? How do I give grace when it feels like he isn’t making it to the potty *on purpose*?” the other asked.

We both wondered aloud, “Does the Bible address this? If Christ really changes everything, how does he change potty training? What does the gospel have to say about this?”

At first the answers were unclear. We started by swapping practical tips, finding humor in our battle stories. We fumbled, but we also dug deeper until we discovered the treasure of the gospel. We discussed our sin issues, building on each other’s thoughts as the transforming work of Christ came clearly into focus. Only when we found our identity in Christ instead of the success of our children were we able to model his love to those who just couldn’t get it. (It didn’t always sound this clear and concise of course, but the gist of it was there.)

Through that process, our motherhood changed in a concrete way. Our children weren't suddenly dry all day, and we still swapped strategies, but the gospel proved more hopeful than any online article, more helpful than any book we could buy, and more sustaining than any quick fix we shared with one another.

It was a relief to find that it really is true—the gospel changes everything.

A Fix That Fails Us

We became first-time moms within nine months of each other, and although we didn't realize it at the time, we both entered motherhood with high expectations. We had visions of tidy living rooms, gourmet homemade dinners, peaceful walks with the stroller, and obedient children who loved Jesus (and their mamas).

We had a lot to learn, but we felt ready for the challenge. As we put together our baby registries—full of cute swaddles, high chairs, stylish (yet practical) diaper bags, and all the necessities—we were starry-eyed and optimistic. We knew there would be hard things, but we felt as prepared as we could be. After all, we were equipped with well-rounded registries, how-to books on motherhood, mom-friends who had gone before us, and the endless answers a Google search could provide.

Today, with eight kids between us, our optimistic expectations have toppled under the pressures of everyday life. Just like when we realized our carefully selected muslin swaddles were insufficient at holding our Houdini babies' arms in place, motherhood left us feeling inadequate, frustrated, and desperate for new solutions. We hastily searched for answers to where, when, and why our mothering went wrong. Although we found some helpful tips and practical strategies, in the end, the how-to books offered insufficient instructions, our mom-friends did things we didn't understand and didn't want to emulate, and Google (in all its millions of search results) didn't always hold the correct answers to our questions.

Other moms around us experienced a hole in their hopes for motherhood too. And it wasn't just our own mom-friends—it's a nearly universal experience in modern motherhood. According to a Barna Group study, 95 percent

of moms say they need to do better in at least one area of life, 80 percent say they feel overwhelmed by stress, 70 percent say they don't get enough rest, and more than 50 percent feel overcommitted and dissatisfied by their balance of work and home life.¹

If motherhood is supposed to be so wonderful—one of life's biggest blessings—why do we feel stressed, tired, dissatisfied, and overcommitted? If social media personalities, motherhood gurus, and book-writing experts hold the answers, why do we need more and more help?

Sometimes our response to “not enough” feelings in motherhood is to brush off our guilt instead of looking beneath it. Influencers, authors, and even our own friends and family tell us that simply because we are our children's loving moms, we *are* enough. Our well-intentioned efforts (however large or small) are all that's needed. We should stop worrying about the nagging guilt and create the life we want.

But deep down we still have this lurking feeling that we're missing the mark, and we don't know how to cope with it. So we joke and eye roll about our child's behavior. We post our mom-fails to social media. We let the mess be messy without bothering to clean it up. We tease the moms who seem more balanced or accomplished. When in doubt, we carve out more “me time” or escape into exercise, food, work, or social media. We lower the bar until our guilt is quieted.

If you are like us, these tactics fail to fully alleviate the guilt, stress, and pressures of everyday motherhood. Instead they send us on a confusing trial-and-error journey, where we never find rest. We can handle the striving for a while, but eventually something as simple as another potty training accident sends us over the edge. We're left dizzy, discouraged, and disarmed.

The mom culture at large and your natural desires want you to believe joy and success are won in the battle between the spilled milk and the kitchen floors, the stickers and the progress chart, your work and life balance, or your attitude and your child's behavior. But that's not it at all. This is a battle that's much

1. The Barna Group, “Tired & Stressed, but Satisfied: Moms Juggle Kids, Career & Identity,” *Barna*, September 1, 2018, <https://www.barna.com/research/tired-stressed-but-satisfied-moms-juggle-kids-career-identity/>.

bigger. A cosmic battle. It's a battle between the spirit and the flesh. Between good and evil. Between life and death.

It's a battle for your very soul.

Why We Need a Risen Motherhood

The world would have you believe the problem is that you can't *seem* to get your act together, but the reality is that you *can't* get your act together. Not in the sense that your sink always seems to be piled high with dishes, or you're not getting to the gym as often as you should, or you shoot random discipline strategies from the hip every 30 minutes. No, you can't get your act together because you're a sinner in need of a Savior.

Instead of showing our children the grace we've been shown, we build walls of rules and regulations to earn God's favor. Instead of serving our husbands out of love, we grumble in our hearts and keep a record of all the ways they've let us down in the past. Instead of spending time with our neighbors, we close up because we don't want the inconvenience or discomfort of getting to know someone new. Instead of reorienting our standards to God's, we look to our friends' or our news feeds. Instead of putting our hope in Christ, we put hope in our own efforts and comfort—living for naptime, bedtime, when Daddy gets home, when we get to leave for work, or when we'll have time to zone out on our phones.

In the short term, we are far too easily motivated by the promise of a Netflix binge, the sweet treat in the pantry, or the upcoming girls' trip. But none of these things last beyond a moment, and they don't cure the problem deep within us. We cannot will ourselves into finding joy in motherhood because we cannot will ourselves into the obedience or love God requires of us. If we're to find true, lasting joy in our motherhood journey, what we need is the work of Jesus Christ.

We don't need the world's version of motherhood; we need a risen motherhood, transformed by the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. We need his shed blood if we're going to shed our guilt and failures. We need his fullness to fill us where we are empty. We need his sacrifice and hurt so we can sacrifice for others